

Ruby Bridges

Authored by: Deserae Archibald

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Related Topics: Differences
Equality

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Background Information:

Ruby Bridges was born in Mississippi to a family that was very poor. Her parents worked hard to provide for her, but there were many nights that there was nothing to eat for dinner. At the age of 4, Ruby and her family moved to New Orleans, Louisiana, where her parents obtained better jobs.

In 1960, the treatment of African Americans was not equal to that of whites. Black children attended different and separate schools than white children. While it was illegal to treat African Americans different than other people, much of the south didn't comply with these laws.

When Ruby was old enough to begin school, a judge ordered her to attend an all white

elementary school. She and her parents were so very proud to take part in this important event in history. The Bridges' family attended church every Sunday thanking God for this opportunity and asking for the strength to stand up for what they believed. Ruby's parents taught her the importance of holding her head high and to be proud of who she was, and that's exactly what she did!!

Ruby's first day at Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans came quickly. As she walked to school, she was escorted by two federal marshal's. The city and state officers in New Orleans refused to escort Ruby to school because they did not want Ruby to attend an all white school. So, the President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, intervened and sent federal marshals to protect Ruby. What would Ruby need protection from? Angry mobs!! Along the streets and sidewalks, Ruby faced several angry people screaming and yelling "Blacks don't belong in our schools!" As Ruby approached the Frantz Elementary School, the mobs got worse. It was a good thing Ruby had federal marshals to protect her because several of the people in the mob looked angry enough they could have hurt her. When she arrived safely inside the school building, she noticed that she was the only child there. In fact, the only other person inside was her teacher. Every child who attended Frantz Elementary School stayed home. Their parents didn't want their white children to attend school with Ruby because she was black. So, while Ruby was learning how to read and write, all of the other children stayed home.

Each day, Ruby had to face these angry mobs as she walked to and from school. The days turned into weeks, and the weeks turned into months and still Ruby was the only one in the Frantz Elementary School receiving an education.

One day as Ruby was walking to school, she stopped in the middle of the angry mob and began to talk. This made the mob go crazy and they began yelling even louder. The federal marshals got scared at what the mob might do and urged Ruby to continue walking. Again, she arrived safely at school. Ruby's teacher asked her why she had stopped to talk to those angry people. Ruby corrected her teacher by telling her that she wasn't talking to the people, she was talking to God. Every day, as she walked to and from school, she would repeat this prayer:

*Please, God, try to forgive those people
Because even if they say those bad things,
They don't know what they're doing.
So You could forgive them,
Just like You did those folks a long time ago
When they said terrible things about You (Coles, no page, 1995)*

Later that same year, Ruby was joined by two white children at the Frantz Elementary School. As each day passed and more children returned to school, the mob quit their protests. It was obvious that Ruby was not going to let the angry mob intimidate her. In fact, Ruby finished her first grade year at Frantz Elementary School and went on to

graduate from high school.

Ruby is still living in the New Orleans area with her husband and 4 sons (all of which attended school in the New Orleans Public School System).

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References:

Coles, Robert. (1995). The Story of Ruby Bridges. New York, NY: Scholastic.

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Objectives:

1. Children will observe and record differences among their classmates while participating in activities that promote thinking and enhancing social skills.
2. Children will understand the meaning of equality and it's importance in each of their lives.
3. Students will be able to select and defend a word that they think best describes Ruby Bridges.
4. Children will gain a knowledge of Ruby Bridges and of her contribution to our society.
5. Students will communicate their understanding of differences and the effects differences have on our lives.

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Time Allotment: Approximately 5 days.

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Resources Needed:

The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles
Parent Letter (see appendix)

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Procedures:

1. **Think-pair-share.** Individually, have students think of the many differences they note among their classmates. For example, eye color, hair color, languages spoken, having the ability to roll their tongue, etc. In pairs, have the children share the differences they thought of. As a class, students will list all of the differences they came up with.

The students will then chart these differences. While charting these differences, the teacher will point out that there are numerous differences among the class and that each difference makes us unique from everyone else.

2. **Guided Discussion:** Discuss the differences charted from the think pair-share activity. Define the term equality and ask children if these differences make one person better than another. Provide children with hypothetical situations in which some of the class members were given certain privileges that other students could not participate in because they were different. For example, only girls were allowed to eat their lunch in the cafeteria while the boys had to eat their lunch outside (no matter what the weather was like). Or, children who were left handed had to attend a different school from those right-handed children. Ask students how they would feel if they couldn't do everything that other children could do just because they were different in some way. Emphasize that although we may be very different from one another, we are all equal and that we each deserve the same opportunities and privileges. Reinforce what the meaning of equality is.

Briefly introduce Ruby Bridges to the students as one who was viewed by many as having differences from others. Focus children's attention on Ruby's courage and strength as you read The Story of Ruby Bridges.

3. **Numbered Heads:** Upon reading the book The Story of Ruby Bridges, present the following questions on the board:

Who was Ruby Bridges?

What made Ruby so different from everyone else?

How would you feel if you were Ruby?

What would you do if you were Ruby in that situation?

In what ways has Ruby's strength and courage affected your lives?

Divide the class into 4 or 5 groups. Within each of these groups, have children number themselves 1 to 5. Each group will discuss all of the five questions on the board, making sure each member understands both the question and the answer. Once each group has been given enough time to discuss each question, assign the 5 questions on the board a number 1 through 5. Each group member will be responsible for the question that matches their assigned number (given earlier in the activity). Provide students enough time to gather their thoughts. Each group member will then be given the opportunity to orally share what they have discussed as a group.

4. **Corners:** Have the following 4 words taped up in the 4 corners of your classroom:
patient
courageous

hopeful peaceful

Call students attention to the following statement: "The word that best describes Ruby Bridges is..." Ask students to decide which word they agree with most and ask them to stand in that corner. Make sure that the children know what each of the words mean before you expect them to successfully accomplish this activity. As a group, students should discuss their reasons behind choosing their word and then explain it to the rest of the class. Students will then write a letter telling Ruby Bridges why they think what she did was important (the address to Ruby Bridges Foundation is located at the back of The Story of Ruby Bridges).

5. Value Whip: Starting at one end of the room and going quickly around to the other side of the room, like a whip, ask the students to respond to any of the following questions:

- "What is one thing you would change in Ruby Bridges life? Why?"
- "If you could chose one of the qualities of Ruby Bridges for yourself, what would you chose and why?"
- "If there was a child who was different form everyone else and wasn't allowed in our school because of that difference, would you do anything to help that child? Why or why not?"
- "If you were Ruby Bridges would you have continues going to school or would you have stayed home where you were safe?"
- "Are you proud of who you are and what differences you may have?"

Give students a minute to think about the question you have asked them to respond to before beginning the activity.

6. Family Involvement: To go along with the theme of difference, children and their families will be given the opportunity to recognize and celebrate their differences (which many include a tradition, family vacation, or a special occasion). At the end of the week, culminating our discussion on differences, each child and his/her family will have the opportunity to share a difference unique to their family. Conclude with a discussion celebrating our differences.

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Assessment:

1. Chart for Think-Pair-Share will be assessed for students understanding of differences.
2. Assessment will occur informally through observations made by the teacher during the guided discussion.

3. As the groups of students discuss the questions for numbered heads, the teacher will walk around the room and monitor children's participation in the discussion. Final oral responses will also be assessed anecdotally.
4. Letters will be assessed for their understanding of Ruby Bridges' contributions.
5. Assessment will occur based on children's participating in the Value Whips activity.
6. Assessment of the family involvement will be made through observations of the students reactions, questions and comments about each family's "difference."

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